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Songs of the Birds

WOOD WRENS

SONGS OF THE BIRDS

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JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LIMITED
VIGO STREET LONDON W.1 MCMXXII

The secrets held by the creatures nearer than we
To earth he sought, and the link of their life with ours.

G. MEREDITH, *Melampus.*

Printed in Great Britain by the
CURWEN PRESS
Plaistow, London, E.13

TO

WILLIAM WARDE FOWLER

Late Sub-Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford

Author of 'A YEAR WITH THE BIRDS'
'SUMMER STUDIES OF BIRDS & BOOKS'
'TALES OF THE BIRDS,' &c.

Three things, old friend, in youth revealed,
With you are interwoven—
A Common Room, rich Walks afield,
Rare Evenings with Beethoven.

They came as joys at twenty-five,
When life was far from thrifty;
They prove delightful still, and thrive
In memory at fifty.

To you, then, who in those far days
Could overlook my blindness,
I dedicate these rustic lays—
Late blossoms of your kindness.

Warde Fowler died in June, 1921, in his 75th year. Although delays in publication may seem to render this dedication vain, I retain it unchanged as a memorial of my debt to him. W. G.

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The Interpretation of Bird-Music

THE INTERPRETATION OF BIRD-MUSIC

ALTHOUGH the songs of birds have furnished material for many a charming essay and have inspired some of the choicest lyrics in English literature, the number of our countrymen and countrywomen who can pick out an individual song from the orchestra of Spring, and correctly identify it, is extraordinarily small. This, no doubt, is largely due to inattention; but the wish to learn is often checked by a lurking suspicion that the songs are erratic and formless effusions, difficult to distinguish and identify without a profound knowledge of Ornithology—and that, of course, is a pursuit only worthy of triflers. This, at any rate, was the state of my own mind when, some fourteen years ago, I found myself brought to anchor in an inland town, away from the sea which had hitherto absorbed my interest, and awakened to a sense of my ignorance of the commonest rural things. It seemed to me that a study of birds and their songs might do more than fill a gap in my own knowledge, since the birds obviously attached more importance to their songs than did Biology.

As I slowly became more familiar with the birds I realized that among the smaller birds, such as Warblers, Pipits, and Finches, peculiarities of song were much easier to detect in the field than the trifling points of plumage and form on which ornithologists based their distinctions of species, and that the songs could be reduced to types characteristic of groups or families of birds as distinctively as structural features. This discovery ensured their scientific interest, for it at once created the possibility of tracing the origin and development of music in a race of creatures far older than man, and with far more ample material.

In the pursuit of this task, however, as has happened sometimes in other circles, I fell in love with my models, and could not content myself with a purely scientific account of their performances. Were there no means by which the limited number of their appreciators could be increased? Could not the distinctive peculiarities of each song be represented, as well as described—the form of the song be conveyed as well as its spirit? At any rate the enterprise seemed worth a trial, and this little volume embodies the first-fruits of my attempts. The peculiar quality or *timbre* of each bird's voice and the resonance of

each sound have been imitated as closely as possible by a selection of human consonants; the composition of the song has been represented by the appropriate repetition, modification, or contrast of selected syllables; the syllabic rendering has been cast in a corresponding rhythm; and round this chosen sequence of syllables a song has been woven to capture something, if possible, of the joy or of the attendant circumstances which form the natural setting of his song.

Some remarks on the actual music of bird's songs are made farther on, but at this point I wish to add that the bars of music which have been introduced here claim to be more than impressionist sketches in very few cases. With the undoubted exception of the Blackbird, and the partial exception of a few other birds (such as the Stormcock, Robin, and Yellow-hammer), the songs of English birds depend far less on tone than on resonance and rhythm, the music being limited to the simplest harmonic play. In most cases the modulations involved are no greater and no more constant than the modulations employed in vocal utterances generally. Indeed, during the year when I was studying the Garden Warbler's songs, I happened to hear a lecture by a well-known Italian lady, whose voice in its modulations and

flow of rich and varied consonants reproduced the Garden Warbler's song to perfection. Similarly, the modulations involved in the Hedge Warbler's song are almost inevitably reproduced by any one who will quickly but distinctly recite such a triple-timed line as 'He promised to buy me a bunch of blue ribbons to tie up my bonny brown hair.'

Before passing on to these and other technical points I think it may conduce to a clearer appreciation of the significance of the songs of birds if we examine a little more closely the avian nature and compare it with that of man. To many people the nature of living creatures other than man is of no moment. The idea that life is one, and that creatures on the lower planes can reveal anything to us of the mysteries of our own nature, has not dawned upon them. Yet there are many things in common between birds and men. They are warm-blooded little creatures, warmer even than ourselves, and accordingly independent, to a greater extent even than ourselves, of purely climatic restrictions. They conquered the air for locomotion long before us, and far more effectively—facts which give them an independence of place and time far superior to our own, and ensuring for them considerable spells of leisure, which they freely devote to elevating forms of recreation.

They are bipeds, and hold their heads up in the world. They have an educational system of a simple but effective kind, based, as ours is rapidly ceasing to be, on family life and parental responsibility. Lastly, they have an æsthetic sense, and express their emotions in song and dance and displays of finery.

The æsthetic capacities of birds, however, have never been taken very seriously. The poets use the birds merely as symbols of the unattainable, as convenient foils to set off their reflections on human shortcomings and human limitations. They attribute, it is true, the most bewildering emotions to the Nightingale, but base these sentiments largely on a pretty but second-hand bit of folk-lore from classic Greece, the main interest of which lies in a different direction.

The men of science, since Darwin, have only contributed isolated observations. I remember a question being set in an examination paper in my own student days on the 'soaring and singing of a skylark,' but I have never heard of a professor lecturing on the subject. Except for interesting studies by various musicians of the actual music of bird songs, we have made little progress in our understanding of the subject since Darwin said that the males employ their voices to please the

females, and themselves take pleasure in their own vocal utterances—a statement of half-truths which could be made with almost equal justice and incompleteness of the origin of human music. Indeed, Darwin maintained that the progenitors of man expressed their emotions in song long before they made use of articulate speech; and he cites the case of a gibbon that produced an exact octave of musical sounds, ascending the scale and descending it by regular half-tones. So when our voices are used under any strong emotion they tend, he says, to assume a musical character. To which may be appended a remark of Warde Fowler's: 'If they (i.e. the songs of birds) are to be compared with anything human, it should rather be with that rude music of primitive man out of which our own has gradually been evolved —with the cries of victory, the wailing of women, the weird chant of the prophetess, or even the *hwyl* that may still occasionally be heard in Welsh pulpits' (*Summer Studies*, p. 133).

Thus we have reached a point at which we can maintain that birds, æsthetically, are probably somewhere near the level of primitive man, and that by the study of bird-song we may be enabled to retrace some of the steps by which the primitive emotional cries were transformed into the

beginnings of artistic music. In the case of birds, it is easy to show that a developing complexity and enrichment of musical expression runs almost parallel with the evolution of bodily structure. Primitive types of bird exhibit simple types of song; the most advanced and modern types of bird (the Turdidæ, or Thrush family) display the greatest complexity and variety in their melodic powers. Yet this development of song in birds is not a mechanical consequence of structural evolution. Some changes in resonance may well be due to alterations in the size and form of the mouth and tongue, and in the hardness and shape of the beak, but the differences due to these factors are not the significant features in the evolution of the music of the birds, which is marked in them, as in man, by steps of increasing complexity in composition. If my readers wish to understand bird-music, they must assume that birds are not automatic musical boxes, but sound-lovers, who cultivate the pursuit of sound-combinations as an art, as truly as we have cultivated our arts of a similarly æsthetic character. This art becomes to many of them a real object of life, no less real than the pursuit of food or the maintenance of a family.

It is not less an art because the bird practises

'Just hear his first efforts when Spring makes him merry!'
(The Chaffinch's Roundelay.)

out of doors without the aid of a written score. Listen to a Chaffinch* in February trying to get his song together again; to a Greenfinch (who 'pours forth his song in gushes') trying to link up his twitter and his note of defiance; still better, to a Tree Pipit rehearsing bit after bit of his complicated programme, until the favourable moment arrives when he is prepared to essay his double performance of flight and song, the least discrepancy in the timing of which will send it all astray.

And if it be urged that the bird sings because he cannot help it, let us reply with equal justice that poets and musicians among us are 'born, not made.' These gifted individuals possess an organization denied to the mass. It expresses itself in an emotional temperament, a sensitive ear, a rich voice or obedient fingers, or in a combination of any or all of these features; but we do not regard Beethoven as a mere musical box on

*There is one vainly making the attempt at this moment in my garden, where the snow still lies thick :

Chip, chip, chip, chip, chip! Whit!
Chip, chip, chip, chip, chip, chip! Whit!

He can get neither cadence nor rhythm, let alone trilled notes and bravura. His attempt is a mere string of unmodulated call-notes, terminated by a distinct monosyllabic note which I take to be an expletive of disconsolate disgust. (8.30 a.m., Feb. 8th, 1922).

that account, or deny the influence of effort on performance. The chief difference between birds and men in this matter lies rather in the fact that the various nations or races of birds (the 'species' of the biologist) preserve their national or racial types of music more religiously than do the modern nations and races of mankind. The birds —speaking of them collectively—have their rustic, classical, and romantic schools of music, but each school holds aloof from the others, and permits no intermixture.

Yet these rules are not altogether at variance with our practice. If an individual breaks seriously away from the traditions of his school, he appears to be outlawed or sent to Coventry, unless he is strong enough to carry one or two of his colleagues with him, when he may, in time, be hailed as a reformer. Usually, doubtless, he is snubbed, and his honours are posthumous. These little touches of sympathy make the two worlds kin.

THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS

APART from their songs, birds are well known to possess a vocabulary by means of which they communicate on matters of everyday interest. As they mostly live in isolated families, not in societies, this language is usually of limited extent; and it is

always expressive of feelings rather than of things or thoughts, and is intimately connected with conduct, so that the alarm-note of the mother will stop the cheeping of her chicks while still within the egg-shell. We may distinguish it as a language of momentary emotions, including notes for calling, greeting, caution, surprise, alarm, defiance, and encouragement, but for little or nothing else. In one species of song-bird these notes may all differ in resonance, composition, and pitch; in another, they may differ from one another in little more than emphasis and intonation, and there is every variety between these extremes; but they always display the character of vocables or syllables rather than of simple musical tones. The syllable, of which they may be regarded as modifications, approximates to a monosyllabic *Whit* or *Chip*. But this call has many variants either by duplication, resolution into a disyllable (e.g. *Phew-it*, *Chizzik*, *Chillip*), or incorporation of sibilant or clicking consonants (*Tak*, *Tik*, *Chek*, *Jip*, *Seetz*, *Tsee*, etc.). These calls are bewildering to the beginner, but when fixed and mastered, one by one, they are of great use in detecting the presence of the smaller and less obtrusive birds. The alarm-note is distinct from the call in the higher families, and (like the warning colours of butterflies) is widely shared and generally recog-

nizable, being usually a low-pitched guttural *Chak! Kek!* or a strident modification of the call *Whit! Weet!* But in the lower families of song-birds (Passerines), as of birds in general, the distinction is often one of intonation only. The most striking alarm-note is the guttural rattle of the larger Thrushes (Stormcock, Blackbird, Ring-ousel), the iterated *Whit-it-it-it* of the Song-Thrush, the *It-it-it* of the Robin, and the clicking reel of the Wren. So well known among birds is the meaning of this rattled alarm, that if a Magpie, Owl, Hawk, or Cat starts the alarm-cry of any one of them, birds of all the other species round about will flock in and join their cries in a general chorus of excitement and imprecation.

THE SONG OF BIRDS

SONG, however, in birds as in man, is not the expression of a momentary excitement, but of an emotional state, a prolonged, if periodic, elevation of the spirit; and in spite of attempts to trace the origin of song to the repetition of the call-note, and its progressive elaboration to the conscious imitation and incorporation of external sounds, such as the cries of other birds, the babbling of the brooks, and so on, it is clear to my mind that the song of each bird is at bottom just an emotional trans-

formation of his ordinary language—his everyday calls of every sort, divested of their ordinary meaning, played with as marbles of sound, or as glittering beads to be threaded and unthreaded as fancy, skill, and inspiration suggest—the 'profuse strains of unpremeditated art.' The remarkable thing is that, apart from resonance and *timbre*, the mechanism of tone-production in singing birds* is practically identical throughout, whether the bird be a rook or a nightingale; and that in nature each species has its characteristic type of song, while in captivity the young of many species are known to acquire a far greater diversity.† What confers the characteristic unity and individuality upon each bird's natural song? If my view be correct, the individuality is largely accounted for; since, if the young bird is taken from the nest, it never acquires, by hourly and daily exercise, that familiarity with the normal language of its life which forms the basis of its natural song. The causes of the

* In this volume I deal only with the Passerines or Song-birds.

† *cf.* 'His Master's Voice' gramophone record B.392, in which a captive Thrush sings a typical Blackbird song up to the middle of the record, where it bursts out into a few characteristic Thrush cries, '*Tutee! Tutee! Tutee!*' and thereafter sings erratically. Towards the conclusion it chimes a *Tirra-lirra-loo*, referred to below, in excellent Thrush style.

unity and pattern of the song are more subtle and harder to trace. Here I will merely draw attention to the fact that the nature of the integrating element lies in a sense of tone-sequence, progression, rhythmic balance, and similar æsthetic qualities, the degree of which differs in the various birds we listen to. The series of songs makes a kind of evolutional sequence, the successive stages of which admit of analysis, definition, and description; but, as epiphenomena, they depend for their structure on causes hidden within the organization of each successive type of singer, and are not to be fully explained apart from a knowledge of much that still remains obscure. It is certain, however, as I think my illustrations will make clear, that, while the simplest songs are just glorified reiterations of the call-note, the songs acquire new sparkle and richness with every addition to the bird's vocabulary, until in the Thrush family they gain a freedom and wealth of phrase which marks the transition from mere emotional sound-play to the regions of pure music.

Song in birds is in each generation an expression of the whole joy of life at its climax of achievement and well-being. One of its conditions, undoubtedly, is leisure. It begins with the melting of the snows, when winter lifts his icy hand, and wanes when the duties of family life tax energy to

the uttermost. Another significant condition is a certain isolation or aloofness. Sociable birds, such as Sparrows, Jackdaws, and Rooks, are too busy with chatter and small talk to give themselves to song. Starlings probably afford another example. I have the impression that it was a Starling that sang on the bell turret of the college chapel in my undergraduate days, and I have heard one singing gloriously one wonderful October day in an elder tree in the heart of Leeds. But round my own house, under the roof of which several pairs regularly find lodgment, I have never heard one utter anything but his well-known greetings and exclamations, and an occasional joking imitation of a solemn Blackbird near by.

It is usual to regard the songs of birds as essentially love-lyrics. With Warde Fowler, I doubt this. Love is only one of the emotions which stir a bird in spring; and whether he be a good singer or a poor one, he never seems to lack a mate. Was it not that excellent naturalist Gay who said that 'a Sparrow at all times was ready for love'? Yet Sparrows are not great songsters. Neither expectant nor thwarted love can hold the disproportionate place in a bird's life that it takes in the poetry and romance of mankind. No bird neglects his dinner from pangs of unrequited love, and mooning couples and sad-eyed sentimentalism are

human, not avian, phenomena. In a bird's simply ordered world unthwarted love (coupled with a constancy and devotion no man can excel) provides an important, but not a dominating, element in his spring-time exhilaration. The contest for territory, increasing abundance of food, lengthening days, and brightening skies, all contribute to his excitement and delight. There is no special emphasis on love-notes in his song. His whole being is harmoniously stirred; there are no discordant strings; and he pours forth his soul in gleeful modulations of his entire vocabulary. If, like a Long-tailed Tit, he has only one word at his disposal, his song is just an artless string of *See-see-see-see's*, all at the same musical level. If in his everyday life he employs a more varied vocabulary, he strings his monosyllables together on a simple undulating melody, and his song becomes the sibilant, chittering, or scintillating warble of the Dunnock, Whitethroat, or Garden Warbler. The Wren, with a limited monosyllabic vocabulary but a characteristic alarm-reel, transforms his reel into a high-pitched trill, and sets it as a gem in the middle of his sweet but simple song. So also the Ring-ousel turns his guttural alarm-rattle into a chiming chuckle, which literally sparkles in the midst of his plain and mostly monosyllabic prattle.

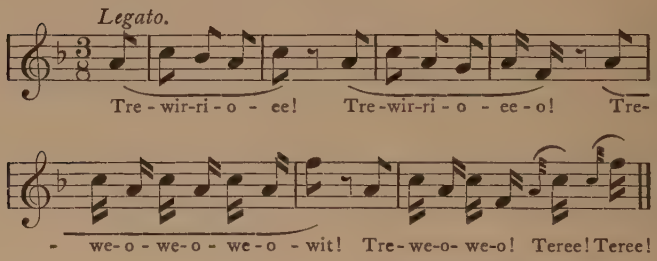
The equivalent of this remarkable chuckle,

beautified almost beyond recognition, and chimed with stricter music, is to be heard at intervals in the song of the Song-Thrush, where it forms, I imagine, the *Tirra-lirra-loo* of Elizabethan poets, interrupting with refreshing surprise the rhythmic balance of his alternating sequences of up- and down-turned phrases.

In the Blackbird—the Beethoven of the birds—it is still a chuckle, though musical and more varied, and is attached as a quaint pendant to the end of each of his stately flowing themes, or shall we say, as a *Scherzo* to follow his *Andante*?

In conformity with what has been said above, it should be noticed that the difference between these two familiar songsters, in their musical use of the alarm-rattle and in its transformed character, is dependent on primal features. The ordinary prosaic alarm of the Blackbird is a guttural cackle, that of the Thrush a much softer *Whit-it-it-it*; so that the distinctive features of the two alarms are retained even when transfigured in the ecstasies of song. But the Blackbird, having discarded the primitive song of short reiterated phrases, and having linked these phrases up into longer progressive themes, has thereby removed the possibility of retaining the chuckle as a central feature of his song. It has become subordinated to a minor rôle.

In this respect the Stormcock (or Mistlethrush) performs like a Blackbird, and for the same reason. But cherishing the Thrush's love of balanced or contrasted phrases, he uses the equivalent of the Blackbird's chuckle less frequently, and, as a rule, only at the end of a whole period of song. As this element is usually chimed upwards, as a resolution of the tonic chord, it resembles exactly the terminal flourish which a young person likes to throw in to decorate the end of an accompaniment which he has been playing to a song (*cf.* 'Teree! Teree!' in the accompanying example).



A Stormcock's Song.

It is many years since I had opportunities of hearing the Nightingale, and I cannot claim to be familiar with his song, except as recorded on the gramophone ('His Master's Voice,' No. B.390). But these records (confirming those of Aristo-

phanes and later writers) make it clear that he is a singer of the Thrush school, who relies mainly on contrasted iterations of rich and startling sounds—the monosyllabic equivalents of the Thrush's di- and tri-syllabic phrases. The long-drawn *crescendo* 'wail,' which cuts through these sequences at intervals with a plaintive falling cadence, seems to be the exact counterpart of the alarm-rattle *intermezzo* of his larger cousins, though all signs of the chuckle have gone, and the chime has been smoothed into a nearly continuous slur of arresting beauty. Notice the art in this achievement. The essence of the Nightingale's song is insistent repetition of highly resonant monosyllabic notes at contrasted levels of pitch. The most perfect foil to this is unbroken continuity of purely musical tones right through the scale. He attains it by transfiguring an heirloom which was originally the most essentially iterative and resonant of all the cries at his disposal! What a stir in the coverts the bold upstart must have created who gave the final touch to this transformation of the family rattle! For in structure, Nightingales are thrushes down to their slender scaleless shins, and there is no escape from the assumption that the founder of the line of Nightingales was a primitive thrush, with a typical rattled alarm, even if his song was still at the monosyllabic stage in other respects.

THE REPRESENTATION OF TIMBRE AND RESONANCE

THE late Mr. Warde Fowler, scholar, bird-lover, and musician, in a charming essay on the Songs of Birds, has written: 'All efforts . . . on the part of ingenious persons to translate the language of the birds into their own are, in my opinion, lost labour, and can lead to no increase of our knowledge' (*l.c.* p. 154). This was said with reference to some well-known attempts to reduce the songs of birds to musical notation; but as he wrote to me two years ago, 'I freely confess that I have a prejudice, and always have had, against attempts to reproduce the songs in musical notation or by syllables like yours' (February 17, 1920). It may interest my readers, therefore, to learn that, knowing my old friend's opinions on this point, I sent him in the spring of 1919 the syllabic refrain which I have attributed to the Willow Warbler:

Sip, sip, sip, see! Tee, tew, wee, tew!
Witty, witty, wee-wee, weetew!

promising him a copy of the accompanying verses only if he could correctly identify the unnamed singer. He replied immediately: 'The song you send is, of course, the Willow Wren, and could be

nothing else!' I could give other instances, but this will serve to show that by a rhythmic syllabic notation alone it is possible to imitate the dominant features of a song closely enough to be distinctive and recognizable.

On the other hand, Warde Fowler did not like my rendering of the Garden Warbler. He wrote (July 29, 1919): 'The song of the Garden Warbler looks ugly in print, not at all like a "gush of rare music."' He said that our friend Macpherson had aptly compared the song of the Garden Warbler to the 'squeaking of a broken perambulator on a marble floor,' and slyly added that he could appreciate my syllables better when he thought of that!

Those who treasure Warde Fowler's writings on birds should not forget, however, that, as with the great musician whose sonatas were such a joy to him, his deafness was a great handicap. Quick as he was to recognize a singer from the general quality of its voice, many of the details must have been quite outside his experience. I called to see him in the summer before his death, and recited to him my 'Music's Quarrel.' He told me that he had never heard the characteristic chuckle with which a Blackbird terminates almost every one of his stately flowing phrases. He begged me to make sure of a fact so completely strange to him. Here again the gramophone lends unexpected

aid, for record No. B.392 in 'His Master's Voice' series will yield the clearest possible evidence on demand. Is it not probable that the tinkle and jingle of consonantal sounds which form such a delicious feature of the songs of our warblers must have always escaped him?

In the case of the larger birds, of course, there is no question as to the possibility of adequately rendering their cries by human phonetics—birds I mean, like the fowl, duck, turkey, pigeon, plover, owl, etc.

Cold doth not sting, the pretty birds do sing:
Cuckoo! Jug-jug! Pewee! To-witta-woo! (*T. Nash*).

The Corn-crake, Cuckoo, Jay, are even named from their cries, as well as some of the smaller song-birds (e.g. Chiff-chaff, Twite)—a list which could be considerably extended if we added the expressive names of many continental, American, and colonial birds (Hoopoe, Bobolink, Chickadee, More-pork, etc.).

In this connection we must not omit the Greek folk-tale of the sisters Philomela and Procne, whose cruel treatment (the latter was immured and had her tongue cut out to prevent her from telling tales) at the hands of Tereus led to Procne's murdering her infant Itys or Itylus, to their flight and pursuit over the Thracian plain until, as

Tereus was about to overtake them, they were all three changed to migrant birds—Philomela to the passionate lamenting Nightingale, Procne to the almost songless Swallow, and Tereus to the crested Hoopoe with the pickaxe beak! So to this day the Nightingale ('immortal bird') bewails with iterated high-pitched cries 'the small slain body, the flower-like face' (*Ity! Ity! Ity! Ity! Ity!*), and pours deep-toned reproaches upon the cruel and inconstant father (*Teréu! Teréu! Teréu! Teréu!*).

> *Jug, jug, jug, jug! Teroo!*—she cries,
> And still her woes at midnight rise (*Lyly*).
>
> *Fie, fie, fie!* now would she cry,
> *Teroo! Teroo!* by and by (*Barnefield*).

(*cf.* Matthew Arnold's *Philomela*, Swinburne's '*Itylus*,' and the more humorous treatment of the story in Aristophanes' '*Birds*.')

Simpler, but otherwise comparable with this charming rustic fancy, is a tale which was sent me a few years ago by the examiner of some school essays written by the children of a Norfolk village, one of whom wrote: 'We also have a Thrush who calls "Mrs. Hewitt, Mrs. Hewitt" so clearly that on one occasion Mrs. Hewitt came and answered "Yes!"'

But *Whit-wit-it-it-it!* and *T'roo! T'roo! T'roo!*

are cries by no means restricted to the Nightingale, and if a syllabic rendering has been sanctioned by universal experience in this familiar case, we may extend it to the many other birds whose softer and less conspicuous songs do not force their characteristics on the ears of rustics and busy townsfolk.

There are many difficulties in practice. Firstly, it is not every bird that, like the Nightingale and Thrush, conveniently—

> ' . . . sings each song twice over
> Lest you should think he never could recapture
> The first fine careless rapture.'

Secondly, many birds warble so quickly that the notes and phrases vanish before you can seize or record them, and memory alone cannot cope with a gush of highly variegated sounds. There is no remedy for these difficulties but perseverance.

And lastly, the difference between a bird's mouth and ours renders some of a bird's consonants liable to run into one another in a manner that after merely cursory attention appears erratic and baffling. A bird that seems to say *Whit!* to one man, says *Chip!* to another. But the reason is simply that a bird has not an inner row of hard teeth as well as an outer lip of soft flesh to border his mouth, but only a horny beak, so that he draws no distinction between labials and dentals, and

emits a consonant half-way between a *t* and a *p*, of which we have no experience. Similarly, his palate is differently constituted; nasals are impossible, and *z* runs on the one hand into *ch*, and on the other into *j*. Under these circumstances, exact imitation of a bird's voice is out of the question, but the greater variety of human than of avian consonants renders it feasible to reproduce many of a bird's sounds and to approximate closely to the others. After all, it makes no serious difference whether we write *Pew-it* or *Tew-it* for the plover's cry, or *Teazle*, *Cheedle*, *Ee-chow*, *or Teacher*, for the Great Tit's. All are close enough to the original to be recognizable, and many of the alternative renderings correspond with natural variations of voice.

In any case, study, as distinct from mere enjoyment of bird songs, would be impossible without some system of notation; and since *timbre* and resonance, rather than musical pitch, constitute the dominating features of a bird's sounds, it is only common sense to use a syllabic notation. Many ornithologists have used such syllables in the past, and, although there are many discrepancies between their records, I feel sure that closer attention to the matter of rhythm and phrasing will soon lead to substantial agreement. If I may venture to say so, the secret of representation lies not in punctilious imitation of every

sound (which is unattainable), but in accuracy of phrasing combined with a fair approximation to the succession of dominant vowels and consonants. It is phrasing that distinguishes the families of songs, resonance and *timbre* the species.

THE MUSIC OF BIRD-SONG

LANGUAGE necessarily includes a musical element, since the vowel sounds alone tend to be uttered with corresponding differences of pitch; and the more emotional the language the greater is the range of tone involved. When this emotional language is given a definite rhythmical form the language becomes song, which may range in type from loose narrative, ballad, or *vers libre* to neat little canzonets and lyrics. The successive modulations of voice involved are just those which are inherent in the vocables employed or are instinctively picked out by the singer as throwing his points in relief. This I take to be the condition of most bird music, the 'profuse strains of unpremeditated art.'

Tone-play is not the primary essence of bird-song, but its outcome or accompaniment. The bird is a minstrel, not a musician. But now here, now there, among the wandering troupes, a musical advance is made. We mark a distinctive

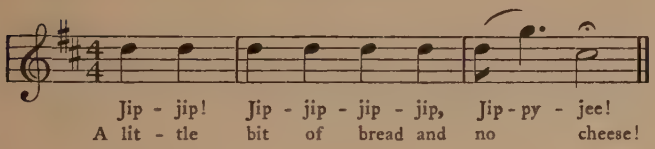
flair about this latest troubadour, and we catch ourselves paying less attention to his words than to his melody. Indeed, he pronounces his syllables so indistinctly that we can barely recognize them, while he resolves a chord upon his lyre which makes us throb. What is it? His comrades had charmed us with verbal wizardry, but he has given us a foretaste of pure music.

Listen to the Chaffinch:

> *Chip, chip, chip; Tell, tell, tell; Cherry-erry-erry; Tissy-choo-ee-o!*

What could be brighter or more cheerful? What sonnet of Shakespeare's more crisp and epigrammatic at the close?

Now to the Yellow-hammer:



the simplest and least modulated song of all, until he rises softly on his penultimate note and opens up infinity on the fall. Yet his next-of-kin, the Corn Bunting, in the opposite hedge of the same

field, is content to jingle a barbaric bundle of t's and z's and k's:

Tík, tik, tik ; Tízzy-ketínkity-teáze !

At a higher plane compare those vocal and instrumental protagonists, the Thrush and Blackbird; the Thrush with his balanced eloquence of pithy phrase, the Blackbird with his 'linkèd sweetness long drawn out'; or the Nightingale and the Robin, romanticists of the same divergent schools—the one carrying vocal iteration and contrast to its climax of expression and variety; the other sounding all the heights and depths of the chromatic scale on his Chopinesque excursions.

In short, music—the play of tone-sequences pure and simple—has emerged from song among birds as in mankind. Underlying the common achievement, of course, lies the uniformity of the mechanics of sound, the mathematic precision of harmonic values, and the essential similarity of the auditory mechanisms involved. But not until song had built up the di- or tri-syllabic phrase, and by repetition of this at successive musical levels, or by union of different short phrases, constructed the flowing compound phrase, did bird-music reach the level of elementary human music; and these were æsthetic, not mechanical, achievements. The Nightingale or Ring-ousel, the Thrush, the

Mistlethrush, and the Blackbird, give us all the stages in this interesting story, if we make due allowance for the fact that each of these birds sings no rudimentary song, but makes an artistic whole of it according to his particular level of evolution.

Coincident with the passage from vocal modulation to deliberate tone-play has gone a greater precision and purity of utterance, stricter observance of musical intervals, the substitution of full clear tones for the slurred modulations of primitive song—in other words, the establishment of a definite scale to divide the octaves. That the Blackbird normally follows a scale closely similar to our own diatonic is certain. But his exceptions are no less remarkable, and it would be of much interest, possibly even of musical value, to subject the problem to closer investigation, as well as to study the obscurer intervals of Finch and Warbler music—a task the difficulties of which the gramophone may help to solve.

But the song, rather than the music, of birds is my theme; and song, in birds as in men, is indistinguishable in its early stages, as we have seen, from rhythmic language. In other words, poetry, however elemental it may be, lies at the root of all the achievements of avian as of human minstrelsy. The catches, canzonets, and lyrics of the Tits,

Finches, and Warblers form the seed-bed from which the antiphonies, rondos, and fantasias of the Thrushes, Ousels, and Redbreast have arisen.

Nevertheless, one has only to listen to the Skylark to realize that superb æsthetic expression is attainable in the earlier phase of song, although the music is of the simplest character. As we learn from his cousins, the Pipits, his primeval song can hardly have been more than the advertisement or accompaniment of a little aërial dance—a string of monosyllabic and disyllabic vocables timed to the beating of his wings, and changing with the successive stages of his performance. But generation after generation of robuster wings, in the joy of achievement, have led him to higher and higher flights, ever accompanied by artistic changes in the phrasing and vocalization of his song. At length he gained the unclouded azure, and his song became the flawless expression of pure serenity. More music would ruin it with excess of art; less play of z's and j's would extinguish it.

'Higher still and higher
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.

. . .

'All that ever was
Joyous and clear and fresh, thy music doth
surpass.'

One need only add to these lovely lines that equal joy and almost equal serenity breathe through the songs of the Garden Warbler and of many another unambitious singer, in which music plays no greater part. I say this not, of course, to depreciate music, but to make clear that, while joy will always find a mode of expression, in birds the basal arts, out of which music has emerged, have not been extinguished in the process, but have continued to develop in directions congenial to the increasing diversity of the birds themselves. The human analogy to this is the persistence and continual adaptation of poetry and song side by side with the development of pure music. There is even a quaint touch of kinship between the rhythmical sound-play of the lowlier singing birds and the alliterative jingle which marks many of our nursery rhymes, as well as the earlier historic phases of our English poesy.

Earth's primal songs were fountains of joy, the outcome of individual achievements and success under simple if inexorable conditions. It was social life that provoked articulate speech, complicated the conditions of existence, and widened

the realms of emotion and reflection, bringing the muse of tragedy to chequer the lyrics of joyful feeling with the note of fate, instead of life, triumphant, which every bird ignores.

'We look before and after,
And pine for what is not;
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.'

In concluding this little sketch of the natural history of song, I gladly take the opportunity of thanking those good friends who have lent me a helping hand through the trespassing adventures recorded below, especially my colleagues Prof. G. S. Gordon and Prof. Rhys Roberts at sundry literary obstacles and Miss Yvonne Lebour at various musical ones. My readers have gained, and I know I have profited, by their kind assistance, but the fences broken in my escapades are chargeable only to my account. My readers cannot fail to share my gratitude to Mr. Shepherd for his unique and lively sketches of the birds he loves so well.

SONGS OF THE BIRDS

NOTE

WITH the exception of Nos. 1, 7, and 13, which are new, the songs included in this volume have already been published. The author wishes to thank the editors of the various journals mentioned below for permission to republish the verses in collected and revised form.

Yorkshire Weekly Post (April to June, 1919). Nos. 2-5, 9-11, 16.

The Naturalist (June, 1919, and May, 1920). Nos. 6, 8 (together with revisions of Nos. 2-5 and 9-12 in June and July, 1919).

The Times (May 8th, 1919). No. 12.

Nature (November 11th, 1920). No. 14.

The Oxford Magazine (February 6th, 1920). No. 15 (reprinted with corrections in the *Fishing Gazette*, December 3rd, 1921).

1. PRELUDE: The Two Choirs

OBERON stirred and rubbed his eyes:
'I feel the Spring,' he said;
'My merry elves, arise, arise,
And sweep the cobwebs from the skies,
Ere Phœbus show his head!

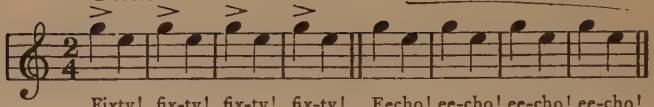
'And gentle Puck, before a spark
Gleams from his orb of fire,
Go, bid the faithful morning Lark
Ascend his watch-tower in the dark,
And rouse my sleeping choir!'

Quickly was swept a pathway grey,
Night's sable curtain drawn,
And ere the faintest peep of day,
Up was the Lark and high away,
Loud heralding the dawn.

Swee! Swee! Swee! Swee!
Zwée-o! Zwée-o! Zwée-o! Zwée-o!
Sís-is-is-Swée! Sís-is-is-Swée!
Joo! Joo! Joo! Joo!
Jée-o! Jée-o! Sissy-sejóo!
Jít, jit, jít, jit, jít, jit! Dzóo!
Zée! Wee, wée, wee! Sís-is-is-Swée!
Swée-o, Swée! Swée-o, Swée!
Swée, swee, swée, swee, swée, swee! Swée!

Awake! Awake!
In copse and brake!
Night's reign is done;
Soon will the sun
Repaint the skies.
Arise! Arise!
Ye birds below!
Pale fringes grow
And surely creep
Above the deep;
His breath of fire
Mounts ever higher;
His rosy frills
Adorn the hills.
Bestir! Bestir!
Each chorister!
Now cleave his spears
The ghostly meres;
The mist he shakes;
Through clouds he breaks;
He glints! He gleams!
His glorious beams
In triumph surge;
The orient verge
Is all ablaze
With golden rays.
Now are ye stirred!
Sing, every bird!
The night is done,
The day begun;

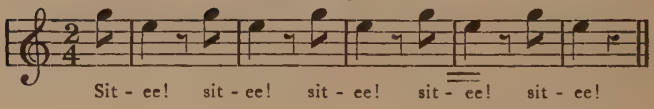
Forte.



Fixty! fix-ty! fix-ty! fix-ty! Eecho! ee-cho! ee-cho! ee-cho!

THE GREAT TIT.

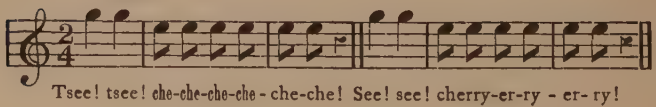
Dolce.



Sit - ee! sit - ee! sit - ee! sit - ee! sit - ee!

THE COLE TIT.

Vivace.



Tsee! tsee! che-che-che-che - che-che! See! see! cherry-er-ry - er- ry!

THE BLUE TIT.

Let every voice
Rejoice, rejoice!

Now shrills a Dunnock from his bush,
A Robin tunes his lay;
A Wren trills loudly; with a rush
Of jubilance resounds a Thrush,
'Tis day! 'Tis day! 'Tis day!

A Stormcock's piping carol stirs
The Blackbird's tranquil themes;
Chaffinches troll; a Starling slurs;
Tits call and answer through the firs—
The air with music teems.

'*'*Tis well! Now scatter!' Oberon said,
'No pranks till night doth fall!
And while my choir sings overhead,
Each elf within his fragrant bed
Hide closely till I call!'

And day by day more gaiety
Inspired a louder strain;
Though strange to tell, the more the glee,
The more did Oberon grieve to see
Titania's spirits wane!

'Dear Prince,' she said, '*'*neath other skies
And other birds among,
My gentle fairies' lullabies
With Philomel were sung.

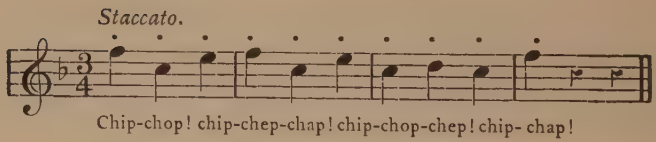
'This Ousel-cock so black of hue,
  This Wren with little quill,
This Throstle with his note so true,
  Their sturdy parts fulfil;

'But we have dreams of softer lyres
  Whose absence makes us sad—
For tender hearts need tender fires
  To turn their grave to glad.

'Dear Robin brings us sympathy,
  But leaves us all in tears;
We pine, fond souls, for minstrelsy
  Which, while it softens, cheers!'

Then Oberon called: 'Goodfellow Puck,
  Out of your hammock crawl!
Sleep from your drooping eyelids pluck!
Fly south, and send us back our luck!
  Titania's music call!'

Away flew Puck with jolly laugh—
  Most happy in mishap—
And sent at once with herald's staff,
To point the way, the first Chiff-chaff:
  Chip-chop! Chop-chip! Chep-chap!

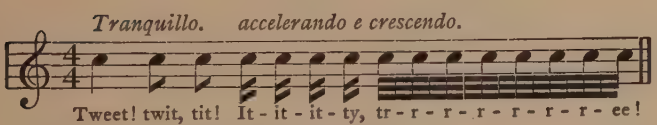


Next Swallows twitter o'er the leas,
  Their mirror'd winglets ply;
And Willow Wrens among the trees,
Like elfin bells, chime down the breeze
  Titania's lullaby.

New travellers the chorus swell
  And fill each vacant nook;
With luscious throat fond Philomel,
The Whinchat on his furze-clad hill,
  The Wagtail by the brook.

Warblers awaken reeds and sedge,
  Or croon in saplings tall;
The Martins build beneath the ledge,
Tree Pipits seize the woodland edge,
  The Redstart guards his wall.

Last tinkles the green Wood-wren: *Tweet,*
  Twit, Tit-it-itty-tr-r-ee . . . . !
Titania's choir is now complete
To ring her round with music sweet,
And everywhere her steps to greet
  With elfin melody.



N.B.—The song of this little bird is apparently identical with that of the American Field or Bush-Sparrow,—a Finch. (*cf. Mathews, 'Field-book of Wild Birds and their Music,' Putnams, p.* 106.)

2. THE CHAFFINCH'S ROUNDELAY

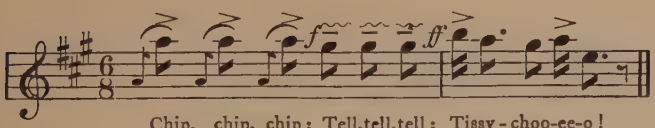
(Oberon's Choir)

HARK to the Chaffinch on yonder tall spray
Buoyantly singing his roundelay gay:
What a rollicking code to his bright little trio!
Chip, chip, chip; Chérry-erry-erry; Tissychoo-eé-o!

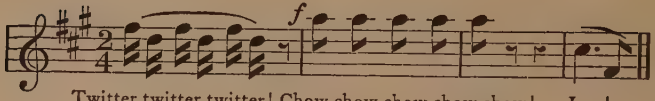
Simple material! artistic finish!
Who may his credit deny or diminish?
Just hear his first efforts when Spring makes him
merry:
Chip, chip, chee, chippity! Chip, chee, chip, cherry!

Meanwhile, the sun's ever-widening sweep
Stirs bright-locked Pan from his long winter sleep;
Young folk exchange love-rhymes, birds brighten
each feather—
(Pan's and St. Valentine's feasts run together)—

So before Valentine's day in the Spring
Pan tunes the pipes of each bird on the wing,
And Pinky rings out his full carol with glee: Ho!
Téll, tell, tell; Chérry-erry-erry; Wáyjo, Sis-cheéo!



3. THE TWITTER SONG OR TRILOGY OF THE GREEN-FINCH



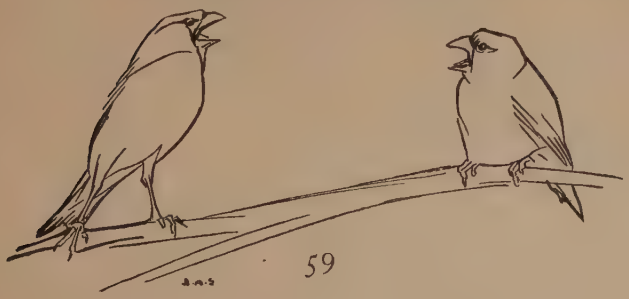
Twitter,twitter,twitter! Chow,chow,chow,chow,chow! Jeer!

(Oberon's Choir)

TWITTERING sweetly in the trees,
Dainty greetings sending,
Throwing love-notes on the breeze,
Musically blending—
Why, then, flaunt a raucous wheeze,
Greenfinch, for your ending?

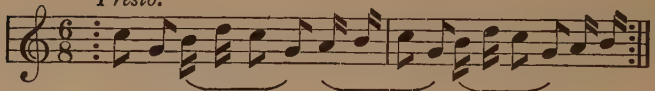
There you ring your tinkling call:
Twitter! Twitter! Twitter!
Chow, *chow*, *chow*, *chow* richly fall,
Full of sunny glitter—
JEE—R!—There now you've spoilt it all,
Mixing sweet and bitter!

That pretty twitter you employ
As well to keep up, on the wing,
Communications aëry;
Those loud full-throated notes of joy
You share with other birds who sing,
Including the canary.
Alas! that, like a naughty boy,
You've learned the taunting jeer to fling,
Nor find your rivals chary!



4. THE WARBLE OF THE DUNNOCK (Cuddy or Hedge Sparrow)

Presto.



Weeso, Sis-sy - wee-so, Sis-sy - weeso, Sis-sy-weeso, Sis-sy -

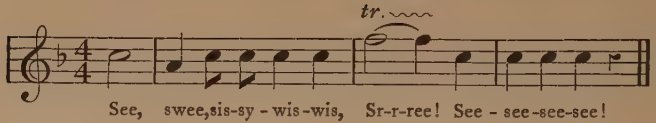
(Oberon's Choir)

HAIL, thou homely warbler of the hedge and countryside,
Equally contented where the rich or poor abide,
Setting example to all on the wing,
Brightening Winter with carols of Spring!

Unpretentious though your lay, and far from rich your voice,
Wéeso, Sissy-wéeso, Sissy-wéeso, Sissy-wée!
Yet a real melody is born when you rejoice—
Wéeso, Sissy-wéeso, Sissy-wéeso, Sissy-wée!
Built by repeating the shortest of staves,
Wée, Sissy-wée, Sissy-wée, Sissy-wée!
Running in rapidly following waves.
Wée, Sissy-wée, Sissy-wée, Sissy-wée!

Modesty like yours, shy Dunnock, earns but little praise—
Least of all, or not at all, for slight and simple lays;
Yet if I gain for you one or two friends,
That will perhaps make the best of amends!
Wéeso, Sissy-wéeso, Sissy-wéeso, Sissy-wée,
Wée, Sissy-wéesero, Wée, Sissy-wée!

5. THE WREN'S TRILL-SONG



(Extra bars are often inserted before and after the trill, and the trill is sometimes repeated in such cases.)

J.A.S

(Oberon's Choir)

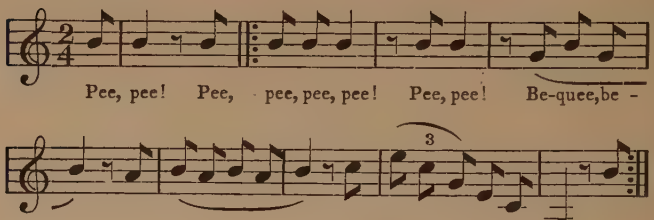
See, Sweet, see, see, see, see,
The sun showers kisses through the tree!
So must I trill
My music shrill;
See, Sweet, see, see, see, see.

See, Sweet, Sweet, Sweet, see, see,
Such joys attend simplicity!
With bliss I thrill
And loudly trill;
I would all space with music fill!
See, Sweet, see, see, see, see.

So sweetly falls in winter sunshine's kiss!
So short the joys endure of springtime bliss!
Then short and sweet the song shall be for me:
See, swée, sissy-wis-wis—trill!—see, sée, see, sée!

Abbeville, Picardy; March, 1918.

6. THE RING-OUSEL'S RONDO



(Oberon's Choir)

A SLOPE of Haytor where the buzzards scream,
Two lonely thorns beside a boggy stream,—
Here a Ring-ousel piped his prattling theme
To heath and fen.

Pee, pée!—Pee, pee, pee, pée!—Pee, pée!
Bequée, Bequée! Tuée, Tuée, Tuée!
CHIÚRRA, KARÓO, KARÓO! Pee, pée, pee, pée!
Then o'er again!

Surely some chuckling linnet in the bush
That *intermezzo* fired, with its wild rush
Of falling tones—not this primæval thrush,
Unversed in art?

Yet hark!—*Tsee-chikaróo-karóo-karóo!*
As when the Throstle decks his own song too
With downward-chiming *Tirra-lirra-loo*,—
Sweet counterpart.

Approached, *Chak-chákka-chákka-chák*, he said;
And then with *Chak! Chak! Chak!* away he fled.
To the old clan-cry our Ousel, then, is wed,
When foes alarm!

Adventurous singer, tardy comes the praise
Of you who first made music of that phrase,
And turned fear's cries to laughter in your lays
Of Doric charm.

7. MUSIC'S QUARREL; or, The Thrush and Blackbird's Pæan*

* Composed for a lecture on the 'Songs of Birds' at Sedbergh School, February 11th, 1920.

(Oberon's Choir)

CHIPPOO-ĪT! Chippoo-it! a Brown Thrush was singing—
Tio-téw, Tio-téw, Tio-téw!
His challenges flinging in cries afar ringing:
Wee-ploo-plóo! Wee-ploo-plóo! Wee-ploo-plóo!

Tutée-o, Tutée-o! Tsi-tsi-téw, Tsi-tsi-téw!
Tu-itty, Tu-itty, Tu-itty!
Weet-wee-téw! Weet-wee-téw! Weet-wee-téw!
Weet-wee-téw!
Wit-wit-whit-wit-wit! Pretty! Pretty!

But a Blackbird, disturbed by this outburst of glee
From a doze in his leafy redoubt
Flew out, crying, *Chínka-chink, Chínka-choo-ée,*
Which is blackbird for 'Burglars! Look out!'

'What's the matter?' called Mavis.* Said he, 'In my sleep
I dreamed all the pedlars were fighting
And invading our grove, crying 'Chairs to mend! Sweep!
Hot Chestnuts! Fresh Whiting! Fresh Whiting!'

* *Mavis,* local name for the *Song Thrush.*

J.A.S

A lightning gleam flashed in the Thrush's dark
eye
As he lowered his head for swift battle—
When a Magpie flew down from his fortress near
by
With a harsh *Chak-ak-ák-ak-ak* rattle.

Pik-pik-pink! cried the Blackbird; *Wit-wit-whit!*
cried the Thrush,
As they instantly faced the marauder;
And they harried him so that from branch and
from bush
He was forced to retire in disorder.

'Now look here!' said the Thrush, 'we must keep
on good terms,
For 'tis plain we can not afford quarrels!
Let us now be quite frank! Had you eaten more
worms
Than was good for you there in the laurels?'

'The case would soon end were it worms'—said
the Merle*—
'That lay at the root of the matter!
The trouble is, how long our heads are to whirl
With the boisterous beat of your chatter!

'Why urge upon me the conditions of peace,
When you are the constant offender?
How oft you've obtruded some noisy caprice
When my song was especially tender!

'Can a singer meet any more painful surprise,
When warbling a favourite lyric,
Than to hear his choice passages tossed to the skies
With an emphasis plainly satiric?

'And is it fair play to cry out, as you've done,
" Mrs. Hewitt! Mrs. Hewitt! Mrs. Hewitt!"
Thus making the good wife expectantly run
In hot haste to her door to undo it?'

**Merle*, an alternative name for the Blackbird or Ousel.

'Stay! stay!' said the Thrush, 'you have said
quite enough,
Though your last charge provokes me to
laughter!
I admit that my banter's inclined to be rough,
But at least I bear no malice after!'

Now the Blackbird's strong point was not quick
repartee,
But his first attack having miscarried,
He deftly put forward a musical plea
Which he thought would less lightly be parried.

He first made a bow, thus the more to display
His glossy black long-tailed apparel;
Then warbled a stave or two—just by the way!—
And chuckled—so grand was his carol!

'Don't you think,' he resumed, 'that your themes
would sound well
If arranged with less reiteration?
Tone-phrases, *legato*, would surely excel
Crude outbursts of vociferation!'

Thus, instead of repeating *Wee-tew* and *Tew-ee*
And *Tu-itty* with so much assertion,
You might sing *Wee-tew-itty*, *Tew-eéo*, *Tew-ée*,
A far more melodious version!'

'Melodious fiddlesticks!' burst out the Thrush,
While his perch with hot anger vibrated,
'Sing yourself and the Warblers to sleep in the
Not so was the Throstle created! [bush!

'My far-flying cries are my arrows of song—
Shafts, too, from no ill-laden quiver!
How they strike when I send a quick-following
Who else can such volleys deliver? [throng!

'Pure tones the sole music! thin songs without
words!
Would you throw all our art in confusion?
Was our cousin the Nightingale crowned among
In a fit of world-fevered delusion? [birds

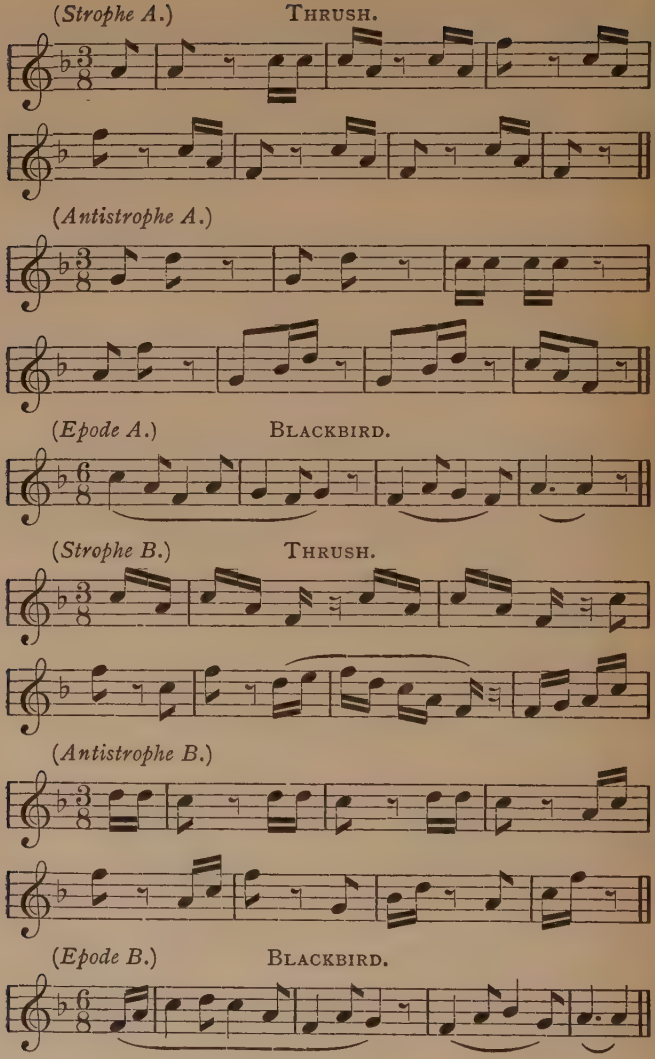
'Would you have us finessing with sharply-cut notes
Like these decadent later musicians,
Who for keyboards and wires have abandoned their throats
And forsaken the ancient traditions?

'Be ever my strains like the wild hurricanes,
Nor my voice from my lyre be sundered,
That my cries may resound and rebound o'er the plains
As the pæans of Pindar were thundered!

'But an end to this argument! Brother, the Sun
Is westering low in full glory!
Shall we not do to-night what so oft we have done,
And in harmony sing the great story?

'Young Redbreast there thinks himself more up to date
With his polychromatic caprices,
And Philomel soon in the dusk will relate
Of the passion which tears him to pieces;

'But you and I, brother, will in old classic mode
Sing a hymn to the praise of Apollo:
My strophes his praises, your flowing epode
The delights of the peace that will follow!'


(*Strophe A.*)
THRUSH.
(*Antistrophe A.*)
(*Epode A.*)
BLACKBIRD.
(*Strophe B.*)
THRUSH.
(*Antistrophe B.*)
(*Epode B.*)
BLACKBIRD.

THE PÆAN

THE THRUSH SINGS:

Strophe A.

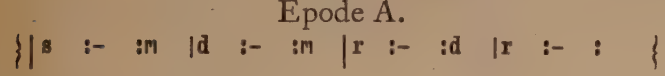
Wit, whít! Chip, chip, chéo! Chee-oo-ít! Chee-oo-ít!
Wee-ploo-plóo! Wee-ploo-plóo! Wee-ploo-plóo!

Antistrophe A.

Tútee! Tútee! Tirri-tírri! Pew-ée!
Plóo-pety! Plóo-pety! Pleo-plóo!

THE BLACKBIRD WHISTLES:

Epode A.



THE THRUSH SINGS:

Strophe B.

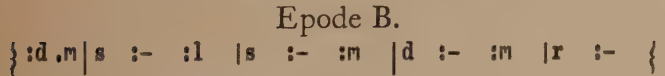
Cheo-wéo-ploo! Cheo-wéo-ploo! Tre-trée! Tre-trée!
Tirra-lírra-lirra-lóo! Tuey-túey!

Antistrophe B.

Tsit-si-téw! Tsit-si-téw! Tsit-si-téw! Pen-y-gén!
Pen-y-gén! Tu-ítty! Ploo-plóo-ey!

THE BLACKBIRD WHISTLES:

Epode B.



J.A.S

ECHO OF THE AGES

(Ancient Greece, B.C. 450)

Ἀκτὶς ἀελίου! ὦ μᾶτερ ὀμμάτων! 1)
ἰή! Ἄπολλον, Ἄπολλον!
ἴητ' ἴητε! νῦν μέτρα παιηόνων! 2)
Παιὰν δὲ μήποτε λείποι! 3)

ὦ Διὸς [Ἑλλανίου]* φαεννὸν ἄστρον!
οὕνεκεν οὔ σε παιηόνων 4)
ἄδορπον εὐνάξομεν. ἰή Παιὰν!
Παιὰν δὲ μήποτε λείποι! 3)

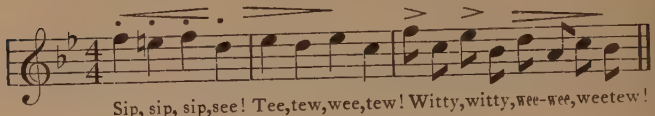
Oh, radiant sun! Creator of sight!
Joy, Joy! Apollo! Apollo!
Proclaim it! Declaim it, in peals of delight!
Never leave us, O healer Apollo!

Blest Albion's star-gems (bright upland and dale!),
We must lay you to sleep never, never,
Until we have sung to the all-healer: Hail!
Abide with us now and forever!

1), 2), 3), 4).—This 'Echo' has been compiled from Pindar's Pæans alone, but represents a phase of Sun-worship more primitive and direct than that of the devout Theban. The numbered passages are taken respectively from Pæans IX; VI, 123; II, 71, 106; and VI, 125.

* Read Ἐγγλανδιου (*pro hac vice*, Scholiast!)

8. THE CHORUS OF THE WILLOW WARBLERS



(Titania's Choir)

AMONG the birds that come and sing
To crown the joys of England's Spring
Some excel in warbles louder,
Others in their plumage prouder;

Yet not a songster can outvie
The little Willow Warbler shy
In the sweetness of his carol
Or his neatness of apparel.

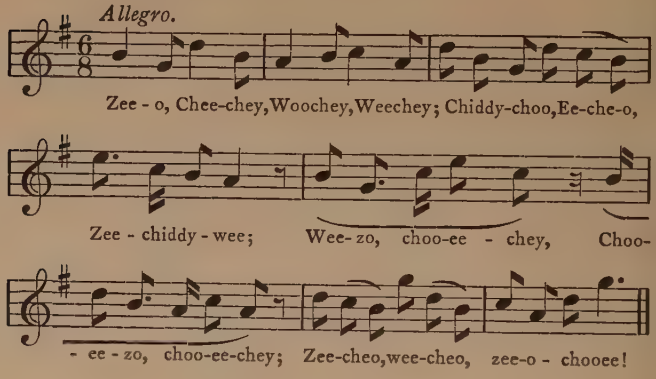
Beneath these trees, hark! from their throats,
The rippling streams of silvery notes!—
Each a tender scale descending,
All in whispers softly ending.

How tremulously sweet they fall,
And, ever simple, never pall;
SIP, SIP, SIP, SEE, Tee, Tew, Wee, Tew;
Witty, witty, wee, *wee*, *weetew!*

But, ere one bird completes his strain,
Another starts the same refrain:
Thus a rustic chorus rises,
Full of nicely tuned surprises.

Philosophers say birds lack wits;
Musicians, sense of harmony.
Fain would I ask them how it fits
That Willow Warblers, lacking wits,
Can blend their notes so charmingly!

9. THE WHITETHROAT'S DANCING SONG


Allegro.
Zee - o, Chee-chey, Woochey, Weechey; Chiddy-choo, Ee-che-o,
Zee - chiddy - wee; Wee- zo, choo-ee - chey, Choo-
- ee - zo, choo-ee-chey; Zee-cheo, wee-cheo, zee-o - chooee!

(Titania's Choir)

WATCH this artful Whitethroat prancing
Just in front with wing-steps light,
Fancy rings of music dancing
O'er the hedge with May-bloom white;

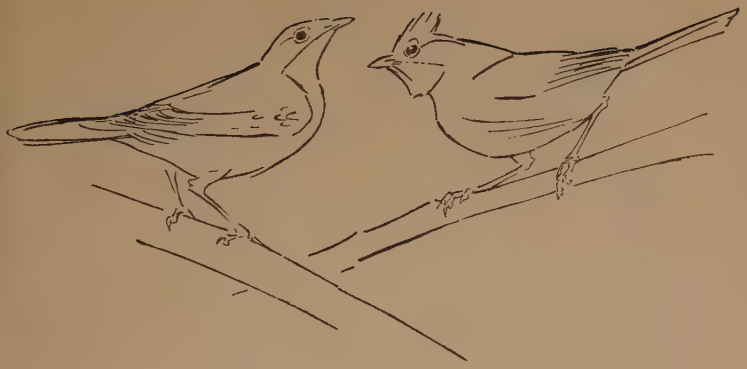
Creeping through the thicket, cheeping
With alarm when we delay;
Heaping melodies and leaping
Loops of joy when on we stray;

Till triumphantly he utters
Something very like a scoff,
Almost in our faces flutters,
Clears the hedge and then is off!

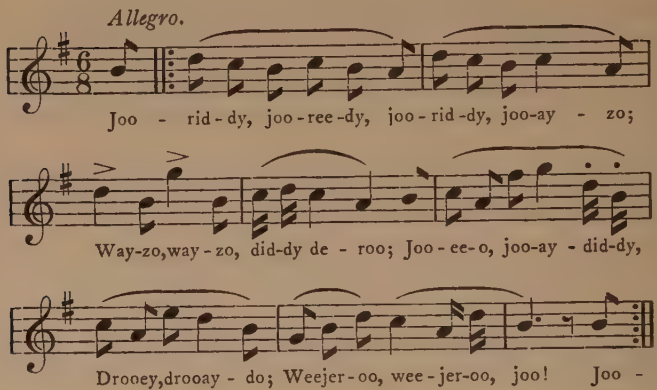
Zée-o, Chéechey, Wóochey, Wéechey,
Chíddy-choo, Eécheo, Zée-chiddy-wée;
Wée-zo, Choo-eéchey, Choo-éezo, Choo-eéchey,
Zeécheo, Wéecheo, Zéeo-choo-ée!

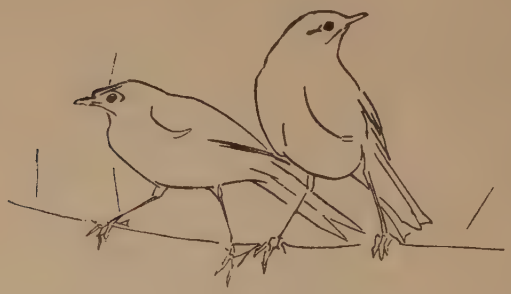
Beating back to take a greeting
To his mate upon her nest:
'Meeting fleeting! They're retreating!
All goes well! Had such a jest!'

Now he freely gambols, skipping
High on light fantastic wings;
Tripping two steps, one step dipping,
See! right o'er yon tree he sings!



10. THE JEWEL SONG OF THE GARDEN WARBLER

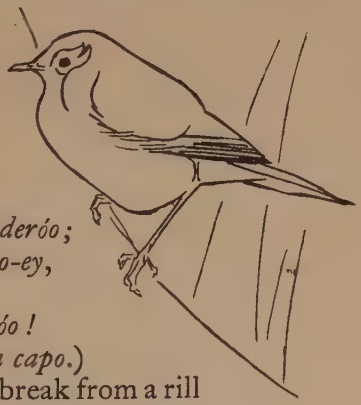

Allegro.
Joo - rid-dy, joo-ree-dy, joo-rid-dy, joo-ay - zo;
Way-zo, way-zo, did-dy de - roo; Joo-ee-o, joo-ay - did-dy,
Drooey, drooay - do; Weejer-oo, wee-jer-oo, joo! Joo -



A SONG of rich jewels all linked in a chain
And freely in sunshine displayed;
Soft lilt of pure melody,—pearls for a strain,
Low-warbled in orchard and glade!

But none of these gems in its beauty conceals
Dark stories of greed and of strife:
As his cadences flow the grey minstrel reveals
Just the joys of a sweet simple life.

Would you hear him? Then come where this grass is so lush—
Put everything else from your mind;—
You shall hear his low gush of rare music,—Oh, hush!—
Near the top of that willow behind!



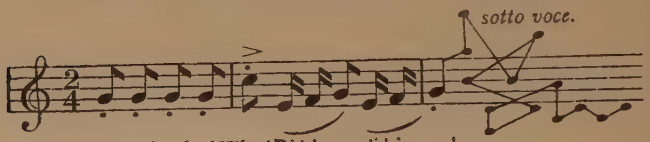
(*Allegro ma non troppo ; dolce ; legato.*)

Joo riddy, joo-réedy, joo-riddy, joo-dy-zo ;
Wáyzo, Wáyzo, Diddy-deróo;
Joo-ée-o, joo-dy-diddy, droo-ey, droo-dy-do ;
Wée-jeroo, Wée-jeroo, Jóo !
(*Da capo.*)

So babble clear waters that break from a rill
Upon moss-covered boulders in spray;
So tinkle light pearls, that a casket may fill,
When poured on a velvet-lined tray;

Like the low lullaby that a mother knows how
To croon o'er the babe at her breast;
Like the ripple of wavelets that welcome the prow
Of a barque sailing home to its rest.

11. THE REDSTART'S ODE



There are quaint resemblances between the song of the Redstart and that of the American Bobolink or Ricebird, as recorded by Mathews ('Field Book of Wild Music, Putnams, 1904), especially in the erratic medley of chattering notes with which it usually finishes.

SHALL we wait now? Ah! do you
see on the rail
Yon sprightly bird? There—with
the flickering tail!
He turns! Just note that lovely
head!
He is off! Mark the flash of his tail
dull red!

Handsome Redster! Soon will he
sing and you'll hear
His music wild—short, unmistakable, clear:
Some opening notes, a brazen shriek,
Then a swift double flourish quite unique.

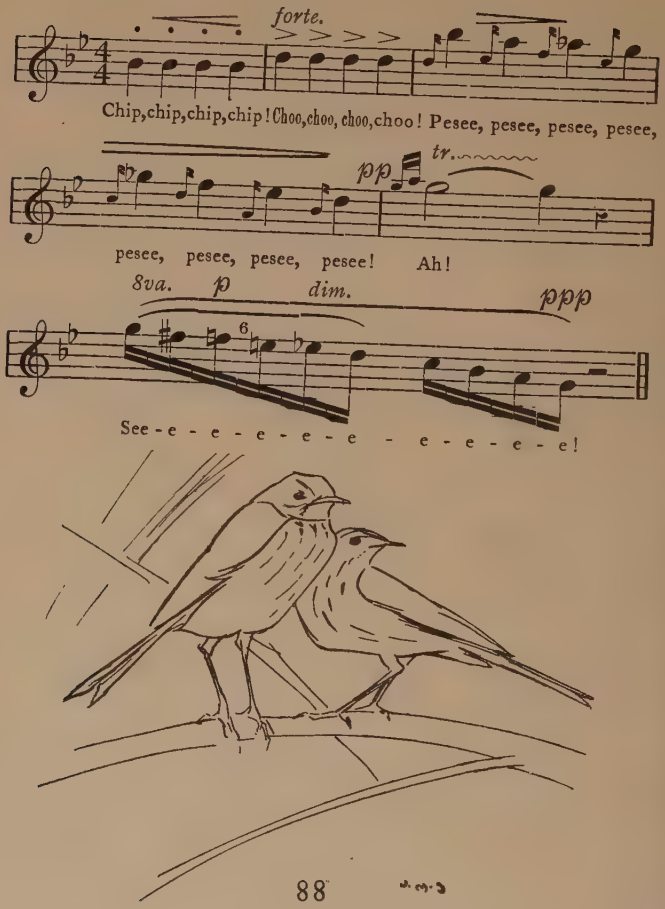
Back he comes! Now hark, over here, in the tree!
Wée-jee! Jée-jee! WIZZ! Did-ju-ée! Did-ju-ée!
With wanton notes oft added on,—
For he's ousel and robin and chat in one!

Gay troubadour, thanks! The romances you tell
In metre so quaint admiration compel!
  But just this point I fain would clinch:
Are you finch playing throstle? or throstle, finch?

Your strain with its touch of Alcæus's lyre,
Its challenging notes and its climax of fire,
  Was surely learnt in Lesbian climes
Far away from a land where the Muse needs
    rhymes!

Or did you from Horace derive your neat ode
When haunting the groves of his Sabine abode?
  Hear Tyndaris Teian ballads sing
By Digentia's stream or Bandusia's spring?

12. THE WING-SONG OF THE TREE PIPIT



(Titania's Choir)

HAVE you, during Maytime's splendour,
Seen from trees a Pipit slender
Silently his perch surrender
And fly aloft as though above the lark at heaven's gate to soar?
But, upon a small height gaining,
Turn around and, downward planing,
Pæans of exultation raining,
His soul in throbbing ecstasy of love and glorious life outpour?

See, above the oaks one rises!
Flight so sheer has no disguises;
'Tis his silence that surprises
When straight he mounts that unseen ladder in the sky above his tree.
Now he sinks, and peals his solo
Loudly, then *diminuendo*:
Chip! Chip! Chip! Chip! CHOO, CHOO, CHOO, CHOO!
PESÉE, PESÉE, Pesée, Pesée, pesée, pesée, *pesée, pesée!*

Wait now, watch, and keep quite still!
Listen to the voiceless trill
Coming from that slender bill
And charged with joy unspeakable of his devotion!

The thrill of rapture waxes, wanes, and dies
As he alights again upon his tree;
And then, if all goes well, there will arise:
See!—e
—e
—e
—e
—e
—e
—e
—e!—

A sigh of ecstasy
So sweet and infinite
That not the gurgling nightingale's rich serenades
Or e'en the skylark's luscious long-sustained cascades
Can hold supremacy
That spell-bound minute.
A sigh?
A whisper to the sunset sky,
Which, softly sweeping down the scale of music's ocean,
Brings tender echoes from the wells of deep emotion.

13. INTERLUDE: MIDSUMMER SILENCE

NOW mounts Apollo for his crowning race,
And drives his panting steeds and blazing wheel
O'er heaven's topmost arch, while peal on peal
Of Jove's applauding thunder greets his face.

The Earth responds, and to his glowing beams
Her last bright panoply of bloom displays;
The Honeysuckle winds its scented sprays,
And, where the wild Rose shone, the Bindweed gleams.

The groves are silent, all those voices mute
That raised exultant music to the skies;
The dawn's grand chorus flickers down and dies;
Life seems of glory stripped . . .
When hark!—a lute!

A frail and tinkling lute in sole relief
Plucked first to heights where music shrills to pain,
Then down the strings like sweet refreshing rain—
Nature transfigured masking Nature's grief.

So Art achieves what Earth could not inspire;
A joy is born in spite of Earth's decay.
Let others only pipe when sunbeams play!
On Robin falls the true Promethean fire.

14. ROBIN'S WATER-MUSIC

(Oberon's Choir)

SCARCE heard amid the choral throng
That gave the Spring its greeting,
You triumph, Robin, when your song
Marks Summer's joys retreating;
Then, while the green leaves flame to gold,
And rain drips on their embers,
You raise, above the sodden mould,
The song of all Septembers.

Erratic, wistful, sweet, and shrill,
The grave and gay you mingle,
As changeful as the trickling rill
That voices glade and dingle,—
From high to low,
Now swift, now slow,
Like water o'er the pebbles,
Meandering here,
And darting there,
To sparkle in the trebles.

Chir'ri-tew! Ir'ri-tew!
Wis'-yoo, Wis'-yoo!
Wee'!—Swee'!—Tew-ay'!
Tew, tew', tew, Psee'!
Chirri-wee'! Tyo-to'!
Se-Wis'sy-wissy, Wis'sy-wissy, Wee'!

Until, in soft soliloquy,
You enter realms more tender,
And drop, from heights of ecstasy,
A falling trail of splendour—
Brilliant gems no casket treasures,
Crystal tones no music measures—
A glittering, flickering, tinkling streamlet,
Fragile as a dream.

See, See', See, TSEE'. . . !
Choo-it'ty, Tu-it'ty, Choo-it'ty, Tu-it'ty, Choo-ee'!
Wee-chee'! Wee-tsee' . . . !
Che-wir'-rio, Ir'-rio, Wir'-rio, Ir'-rio-ee'!
As rockets soar
Aloft to fall in twinkling disarray,
As fountains pour
To break adrift in showers of glistering spray.

Tit-it'! Tit-it-it-it'! Tit'! Tit'!
Yes, Robin, yes! I must admit
(*Tit-it'-it-it'! Tit-it'-it-it'!*)
My actions were suspicious,—
For no true gardener stops his spade
To hear a little bird's cascade
Of music, though delicious!
But when, enraptured, down the scale
You dance by steps so slender,
The Nightingale's *Tyo-tyo'-tyo-tew'*,
The Throstle's *Tirra-lirra-loo*,
Grow pale
Before your rich chromatic splendour!

15. DIGRESSION: TO A HERRING GULL

On Time's Changes

BOLD Sew-mew—you whose soaring flight
Disdains my envious Muse—
Pray, with this compliment polite,
My liberty excuse

In asking what bird-politics
Urged you the seas to roam,
Whose spotted eggs and speckled chicks
Proclaim a moorland home.

Have you those upland joys forgot
By oozy bogs and rills—
Your Plover-cousins' happy lot
Among the fern-clad hills?

When Curlews flute their rippling call
And hasten to the moors,
Does memory then exert no thrall?
The voice of Spring no lures?

Your Black-capped brothers are content
To nest by marsh and mere,
While you on seaward sites seem bent,
Most comfortless and sheer!

Was it perhaps that, as with men,
Succession by entail
Left Blackcap all the ancestral fen,
And you—to face the gale?

You're on the brink! Remember, if
The land you quite forsake,
Your sailor brother on the cliff
Is now a Kittiwake,

And never, ev'n in winter gales,
May to the fields repair,
To eke out there with grubs and snails
His interrupted fare!

And all young Kittiwakes are vowed
To go at once to sea:
No playing on the sand's allowed,
Despite their pedigree!

Nor may they don the heather dress
Your youngsters wear to-day:
Young Kittiwakes must acquiesce
In suits of white and grey!

Alas, what boots it? Fish and shrimps
Monopolize your thought;
Nor dress, nor play, nor Spring-time glimpse
Of ancient home counts aught!

You'd be a sea-bird? Well I know
  Persistence wins at last;
Although afloat you're very slow,
  And, up above, too fast.

True fishing-birds of course deride
  Mere puddling on the shore
And snapping flotsam from the tide—
  Far deeper goes their lore!

Yon old black Cormorant on the rock
  Scoffs at your levity:
Your high top-hamper gives a shock
  To one who knows the sea.

Hull-down he swims: you merely float,
  A cork upon the waves.
Astern no storm-tried fishing-boat
  Rigs out a pile of staves!

And then your clamour, your wild screams,
  When tasteful morsels rise!—
As though a greater noise redeems
  The lesser enterprise!

These taints of longshore life betray
  Your source, where song is wrong:
They do and dare in silence, they
  To whom the seas belong.

No, Seamew! for the ocean deep
You're not full-fitted yet;
But, while those mighty wings you keep,
You need feel no regret.

Your dainty yacht for pleasure trips
Will serve in breezes soft;
And, when the storm-fiends come to grips,
You'll wheel your course aloft,

And mount and glide and swerve and swoop
And soar upon the gale—
Close-reefed one moment dive and droop,
Then race away full-sail.

Who is it, Cormorant, now who laughs
In his empire of the air?
No question now of surplus gaffs,
Or what to trim and pare!

Go south, and tell your cousin lone,
Who knows not of his loss:
Here's one who has usurped his throne—
Challenged the Albatross!

16. EPILOGUE : Peace after Storm

A SUMMER storm passed o'er this quiet grove
An hour ago. A turgid mass of cloud
Rose on the horizon, broadened out, and strove
With the bright sun, spreading a murky shroud
Beneath his rays. Life fled to shelter. Flash
On searing flash clove the dark sky—one split
Yon tortured oak—while many a thunder-crash
Deafened the ear. But now, how exquisite
The fragrance of the sweetened earth and air!
This gentle breeze, which stirs the dripping leaves,
How fresh and grateful! Almost everywhere
Some little bird a joyous carol weaves,
Peace in his heart and all around revealing—
Hark! Are those joy-bells such a message pealing?

July, 1919.

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